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<https://ajp.com.au/education/clinical-pharmacy/clinical-tips-cancer-and-alternative-treatment/>

The Australian veteran population can be loosely grouped into the younger veterans that are currently serving in, or returned from recent conflicts, to the 'young elderly' (65 to 74 years of age) from the Cold War era, to the near centenarians and centenarians from the earlier conflicts of World War 1 and 2.

In 2013, 58.2% of veterans receiving medical treatment under the Gold or White cards were males being on average 71.3 years of age, while the average age of females was 83.4 years. Overall, 51.5% were 80+ years of age (ranging from <30, to 90+ years of age).

Compared to the Australian population, the average veteran is older in age and takes more medications, putting them at higher risk of experiencing medication-related problems. Pharmacists have an important role to play in helping prevent medication misadventures. They can assist through the provision of Dose Administration Aids (DAAs), and accredited pharmacists can undertake Home Medicines Reviews (HMRs). While these services need to be initiated by the veteran's GP, pharmacists can play an active role in suggesting that the veteran discuss with their GP, or directly consulting with the GP (with permission from the patient), about accessing the DAA and HMR services.

Dose administration aids

A DAA service is funded through the DVA, and can be provided free to eligible veterans and war widows. DAAs can improve medication adherence and health outcomes, while reducing adverse drug events. However, not all veterans will benefit from using a DAA, and a HMR is a useful avenue to determine the suitability and need for a DAA.

Home medicines reviews

HMRs improve health outcomes, are an effective way to address medication related issues, and can help veterans to better understand and manage their medications more confidently. Recent changes to the eligibility and administration of HMRs came into effect March 2014 and are expected to continue for the remainder for the 5th Community Pharmacy Agreement which ends in 2015. Details regarding the changes can be found at <http://www.5cpa.com.au/initiatives-programs/medication-management/home-medicines-review> – so watch this space!

As a generalisation, the younger veterans might be at a lower risk of medication misadventures as their younger age may mean they have less medical conditions and co-morbidities, and hence may be taking fewer medications compared to their older counterparts. Nevertheless, posttraumatic stress disorder is the most commonly treated condition in those that served in recent conflicts, so these veterans may also require support with their medications, and can also benefit from HMRs or having DAAs as well. Pharmacists are the most accessible healthcare professionals, and have an important and active role to play in supporting our veterans with their medication use, and helping to improve their quality of life.